RESEARCH PRIORITIES FOR TARO IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

COMPILED BY LISA FERENTINOS

During the final session of the conference, participants divided themselves into groups to discuss priorities for future taro research in the Pacific Islands. Despite differences in the diseases and insects between the islands, common themes are also present. The following areas were identified in the concluding session of the project conference as important to most of the participants (not ranked in any order):

Methodology

- Require researchers to include farmers in all phases of projects.
- Establish and encourage mentor farmers through the use of educational extension and video in local languages as a way of exchanging information from farmer to farmer.

Genetic Improvement

- Evaluate taro germplasm for environmental stress, pest, and disease resistance.
- Widen the genetic base of commercial taro cultivars by programs to encourage diversity in farmers' fields as well as tissue culture exchanges between Pacific nations.
- Strengthen the liaison between schools and departments, especially regarding availability of plant material.
- Further integrate farmer and consumer objectives in all phases of breeding programs.

Cropping Systems and Soil Fertility

- Evaluate shade management of *Erythrina subumbrans* and other nitrogen fixing trees in taro for weed control, higher yields, and cultivar interactions.
- Understand ecology of agroforestry plant communities.
- Screen potential living mulch species.
- Evaluate rate and time of application of green manures and mulches.
- Further evaluate intercropping taro with peanuts, sweet potato for leaf, and others.
- Identify locally available sources of limiting nutrients in high- and low-island environments.

Crop Protection

- Continue work on control of Alomae/Bobone, taro root aphid, and *Pithium* rots.
- Understand armyworm (*Spodoptera litura)* and leafhopper (*Tarophagus proserpina)* ecology, life cycles, and economic thresholds.
- Understand the role of *Coleus blumei* in taro ecology.
- Understand nematode and disease interactions.
- Consolidate information about quarantine laws and standardize quarantine rules across the Pacific to prevent further spread of insects and diseases.

Marketing

- Design controlled atmospheric storage and transportation of taro for improved export marketing.

The Editor

L. Ferentinos is the Project Coordinator of the Taro Production Systems Project at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa.

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